

DESIGN AND NEW DEVELOPMENT

High-Style Touches Selected for Choosy Buyers

Appliances and finishes that developers hope will make their condos stand out.

By JANE MARGOLIES

Developers have long worked with starchitects on their luxury buildings, but some years ago they also began hiring top-flight designers to give the interiors the same panache as the exteriors.

Having the likes of Paris Forino, Ryan Korbin or Lee Mindel associated with a building became another way to brand it as special — and worthy of prices that can run more than \$2,400 a square foot, compared with the norm of \$1,500 a square foot, according to a recent Douglas Elliman report.

But while developers hire designers to add a signature style to differentiate their buildings from the competition, it doesn't always work out that way: The apartments end up having quite a lot in common with others in the same market niche.

"Everybody's looking at what everybody else is doing," said Jonathan Miller, the president of Miller Samuel Real Estate Appraisers & Consultants, comparing the phenomenon to the so-called amenities war in which projects try to match one another in the number and lavishness of common spaces. Similarly, an apartment can be "really nice and special and unique — and not dissimilar to the other five places you just looked at," Mr. Miller said.

So how do you distinguish a high-end apartment from a standard-issue one? Here are some of the materials and finishes — trending, but not always new — that developers are hoping will attract affluent buyers.

Herringbone or Chevron Patterns

Remember dark-stained floors? Today, high-end apartments are more likely to have white oak underfoot — particularly European or French white oak from trees that, yes, grow in France — though it's probably not solid oak but rather an engineered product with the wood veneer on top.

Often the planks of wood are not lined up next to one another in staggered parallel lines, but laid out in zigzag patterns known as chevron and herringbone.

Although the patterns are slightly different — with chevron, the planks of wood have diagonal, or mitered, ends so as to create a series of neat, arrow-like points, whereas with herringbone the ends are cut at a right angle, for a woven effect — the overall look is similar. The technique can also be used with other flooring materials, including marble, and sometimes appears in bathrooms.

Such floors do require more time and ex-

pertise to install, and have a whiff of the intricate parquet that designers sometimes specify for one-off interiors for individual clients. But they can be achievable even when you're "doing the floors of 100 units in a building," said Ms. Forino, who selected chevron for the 53-unit 359 Second Avenue, which recently broke ground in Manhattan's Gramercy neighborhood.

Other designers stick with the standard layout but specify extra-wide wood planks for an industrial-chic look. Whereas planks in most new developments today are three-and-a-quarter inches wide, said Joel Lefkowitz, the executive vice president of Wood Manners, a Spanish-based flooring company, the Daniel Romualdez-designed apartments in 70 Vestry, in the West Village, the oak planks are nine inches wide.

Whichever flooring pattern or plank width is chosen, the finish of choice is matte, usually achieved with low-gloss polyurethane. "Shiny looks fake," Mr. Lefkowitz said.

Marble Is Everywhere

The man-made stone — like Caesarstone, Corian and so-called quartz — specified in more moderately priced interiors is certainly durable, but high-end homes are done up in marble. At 40 Bleecker, in NoHo, Mr. Korban employed marble for two-tiered kitchen counters and used "book-matched" pieces (mirror-image slabs laid side by side) on stove hoods, an appliance more commonly associated with utilitarian stainless steel. In bathrooms, marble can appear on practically every surface.

Calacatta, a gray-veined marble quarried in Carrara, Italy, remains the go-to choice. Bianco Dolomiti has its followers, too. "We like it because it is subtle," said David Mann, the founder of MR Architecture & Décor, who designed the interiors of 111 Murray, in TriBeCa.

As with floors, the highly polished stone of yesteryear has, well, lost its shine. Increasingly, marble is "honed," which has a soft sheen and is "less showy," said Nancy Piraquive, a broker at Brown Harris Stevens and former interior designer.

Kitchen Appliances Abound

High-end buildings are piling on warming drawers, built-in coffee machines, double dishwashers, wine refrigerators and more.

Appliances made in America? Not so much. Subzero refrigerators — the status brand from the last development cycle — still make an appearance, as do Viking and Wolf stoves. But today you are more likely to find European brands like Miele, Bosch and Lacanche — with Gaggenau being "the



ABOVE, STEFANO LUKMAR FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES, BELOW, EVAN JOSHI



Top, a trend toward higher ceilings, at the Front & York sales showroom in Brooklyn. Above, a dedicated art wall at the Hayworth on the Upper East Side.

crème de la crème," said Whitney Kraus, director of architecture and planning for Halstead Development Marketing.

Ms. Kraus said the European brands had a reputation for possessing a "sleeker aesthetic" and being "more high-tech."

Snob appeal might be involved, too. "There's something exotic about having a brand that most people haven't heard of," Mr. Miller said. "It sounds fancy."

Mrs. Piraquive of Brown Harris Stevens sees a more sobering reality: Many new developments were designed with international buyers in mind, she said, and these

are the brands they know. "Unfortunately," she added, "those buyers are gone."

Soaring Ceilings

New York's prewar buildings typically have nine-and-a-half-foot ceilings. In the postwar era, ceilings dropped to eight and a half feet. In later years, they began to inch back up in luxury buildings, to nine feet.

Today, 10 is the new nine, and some ceilings are higher. Madison House, the tallest building in NoMad, has ceilings that reach 11 feet in the apartments, which have been designed by Gachot.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY STEFANO LIKMAR FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES; TOP LEFT, CORCORAN GROUP



High ceilings nibble into a developer's profits because fewer floors — hence units — can fit in their buildings.

Can a ceiling be too high? Ms. Kraus of Halstead thinks so. Ceilings of 10 to 12 feet make for rooms that are "gracious," she said. "Beyond that, it's a waste for everybody."

An Art Wall

This feature may reflect the emphasis that luxury buildings are placing on art — a major piece of sculpture often installed outside the main entrance or in the lobby — and is

based on the assumption that buyers who can afford an apartment in the multiple millions surely also collect paintings and photographs.

The problem has been that many new developments are glassy, offering floor-to-ceiling windows, yes, but leaving precious little wall space for hanging art. Enter the marketing geniuses, who once repackaged slop sinks in basement closets as "pet spas" and have now anointed a swath of unused wall somewhere in an apartment an "art wall" or "gallery."

"Aren't we nice?" Mr. Miller quipped. "We gave you a blank wall."

Smart Tech

When luxury condos cost as much as they do today, the ability to set the temperature of your New York apartment via phone while vacationing on the other side of the globe is a requirement. No need to manually operate curtains or lighting, either.

The marketing team for the Centrale, in East Midtown, a Ceruzzi Properties project with interiors by Champalimaud Design, recommended Nest Learning thermostats for the apartments, said Tariq Mahmood, director of construction for Ceruzzi's New

York division. The devices have occupancy sensors and will turn the heat or air-conditioning on or off based on whether someone is in the room.

"It doesn't make sense to have manually operated thermostats anymore," Mr. Mahmood said.

Bathroom Floors Are Toasty

The master bathroom often has radiant heating, and at Parlour, on Fourth Avenue in Park Slope, it's in the "secondary" bath, too. In the powder room, however, you're on your own.

Clockwise from top left: a Gaggenau range at Cobble Hill House; and at Front & York in Brooklyn, a smart thermostat, marble kitchen and a floor laid in a chevron pattern.